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TAPOL warns British Government of wave of protest if Hawks deal goes ahead

The British Government was today warned by the London-based Indonesia Human Rights Campaign that there would be a wave of protest in this country if it grants a licence to British Aerospace to sign a deal to supply forty Hawk fighter-trainer aircraft to the Indonesian armed forces.

Today's press report follows months of silence after the signing in London last June of a memorandum of understanding between British Aerospace and IPTN, Indonesia's state-run aerospace company, regarding the joint production of dozens of Hawk aircraft. TAPOL believes that the negotiations were probably kept under wraps following the massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor last November when at least 180 people taking part in a demonstration were shot dead by Indonesian troops.

In a letter to Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, Carmel Budiardjo said: "It is hard to believe that the British Government will licence such a deal, after the outrage that followed the Santa Cruz massacre. Besides the killing fields of East Timor there are the killing fields of Aceh where Indonesian troops have killed an estimated 2,000 people in the last two years."

"It is groundless," she went on, "to argue that the aircraft would not or may not be used in East Timor, or in Aceh, or in West Papua. This deal, like others that have preceded it, is material support for the Indonesian armed forces, the very institution which is responsible before any other for the killings, massacres and atrocities that continue unabated in these three territories."

The deal is worth nearly £600 million and would be the largest by far of all British contracts to supply weaponry to the Indonesian armed forces. Since the mid 1980s, Britain has been second only to the USA as a supplier of arms to Indonesia.

On 16-17 July, Indonesia's aid donors meet in Paris to consider a request for economic assistance of nearly US$5 billion. The Hawk deal will eat up the equivalent of 20 per cent of this year's aid packet. Indonesia's current foreign debt stands at $78 billion.

For more information: ring Carmel Budiardjo on 081 771-2904, day or evening.